

Enhancing English-Using Self-Images with Nonnatives as Models

The conceptualizations of English as an international language (EIL), world Englishes (WE), and English as a lingua franca (ELF) have increased in significance over the last few decades as scholars have propagated these ideas in the literature. What the concepts have in common is a rejection of the assumption that English belongs only to native speakers (NSs) and the assertion that many nonnative speakers (NNSs) use English as an additional language to express their identities. However, in many “expanding circle” countries (Kachru 1985) where English is spoken, these notions have not yet made their way into English language education. English remains a “foreign” language for many learners, and they often fail to visualize their English-using self.

In this article, I share two listening activities using NNSs to broaden my students’ perspectives on English and enhance their self-perception as future English users. The activities were designed for classroom instruction, but online access offers additional choices to prepare and present materials. This article first introduces central themes of role models and self-image. It then discusses the further need for EIL, WE, and ELF concept-based classroom practice and presents listening activities using English speakers—some who are not from the students’ country and others who are. Finally, there are suggestions for questions or prompts that teachers might use to monitor students’ reactions, along with a brief account of my students’ comments over time.

KEY CONCEPTS

Role Models

It has been argued that role models enhance self-efficacy, which is defined as “an

individual’s subjective perception of his or her capability to perform in a given setting or to attain desired results” (American Psychological Association 2023). In addition to personal accomplishment, Bandura (1982) notes that observing others with comparable abilities succeed increases self-efficacy. Studies indicate that it is vital that observers perceive similarities between themselves and their role models (e.g., Schunk and Zimmerman 2007). A large-scale online investigation by Muir, Dörnyei, and Adolphs (2021), with more than 8,000 participants from 155 L1 backgrounds, shows that a local celebrity or hero can become a role model in language learning. While many participants named a Western celebrity as their role model, Chinese and Indian participants tended to identify NNSs of English of their own nationality as their role models.

Researchers note that aside from direct observation, discussion and imagination are

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beneficial in enhancing learners’ self-efficacy. According to Al-Murtadha (2020), future-self visualization classes significantly increased the L2 linguistic self-confidence of Yemeni secondary-school students. An initial future-self visualization task that Al-Murtadha (2020, 5) assigned his students was listening “to a short successful language learning story from an L2 role model . . . who graduated from the same school” and imagining their future self as “an L2 learner, a worker in an English environment, and a person who is a proficient English speaker.” Students then envisioned goals and plans to aid the development of their future L2 self. Likewise, Munezane (2015) reported that visualization and goal-setting activities enhanced Japanese college students’ willingness to communicate in English.

Ideal L2 Self

Gardner’s integrative/instrumental motivation theory was influential in L2 motivation research in the 1980s and 1990s (Gardner 2010). Integrativeness was conceptualized as learners’ favorable attitudes towards and desire to identify with NSs and the L2 culture. However, after 2000, this approach encountered a challenge—as more people used English as a lingua franca to express themselves, the theory that people learn a language with a motive to be a member of the NS community started to lose its persuasive power. Instead, L2 motivation research began to emphasize how learners’ images of themselves affect the language-learning process (Csizér and Lukács 2010).

In the motivational self-system model proposed by Dörnyei and his associates, motivation is characterized as the desire to reach one’s ideal language self, often described as the ideal L2 self, through minimizing the perceived gap between one’s real and ideal selves (Dörnyei 2009). To achieve their ideal

language self, learners need to visualize their ideal L2 self in a concrete, achievable form. Ushioda (2017) took this a step further, contending that learners should pay more attention to their L1 self. She argues for the term “an ideal multilingual self” instead of “an ideal L2 self,” stating:

The multilingual speaker model and associated communication practices can provide a realistic and meaningful frame of reference for motivation. This is partly because they represent the normality of communication repertoires and practices in today’s world and partly because they represent who students already are and what they can already do as incipient multilingual communicators who are expanding their repertoires, rather than representing only some kind of distant ideal future state. (478)

According to Ushioda (2017), learners should not demean themselves as inferior products with missing parts by comparing what they can do to what NSs can do; instead, they should be proud of themselves as multi-language users who are pursuing better ways to express themselves using their L1 and L2 repertoires. It is crucial in this sense to present NNSs as approachable English-using role models and help learners conceive their ideal L2 or multilingual self.

FURTHER NEED FOR EIL, WE, AND ELF CONCEPT-BASED CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Galloway (2013) and Galloway and Rose (2014, 2018) have vigorously advocated the importance of incorporating EIL, WE, and ELF concepts into teaching. They use *global Englishes* as an umbrella term to include EIL, WE, and ELF. For example, Galloway (2013) introduced semester-long content-based

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classes where students learned the concept of global Englishes through reading, listening, writing, discussions, and presentations. Galloway and Rose (2014) presented weekly listening-journal assignments in which students chose audio from a list of online archives and reported on the reasons for their choice and their impressions of the English they listened to. Rose and Galloway (2017) described a class debate on whether students were for or against the “Speak Good English Movement” in Singapore. Galloway and Rose (2018) also outlined a global Englishes–focused course syllabus highlighting student presentations about a regional variety of English of their choice. However, all these practices were conducted at a small private university in Japan specializing in language instruction, and they may not be easily applicable to other teaching contexts. Therefore, more teaching practices in various contexts need to be shared among teachers worldwide.

Indeed, conditions surrounding English language teaching (ELT) are changing, but classroom pedagogy reflecting EIL, WE, and ELF concepts has not permeated among teachers in Japan. Uchida and Sugimoto (2020) investigated 100 Japanese junior-high-school teachers’ perceptions of English pronunciation teaching. Due to a strong attachment to NS English, only 14 percent of teachers agreed that teachers’ pronunciation with traces of a Japanese accent is acceptable, and the percentage rose to 28 percent for students’ pronunciation. This finding illustrates that despite the growing acceptance of intelligible pronunciation among researchers, many teachers remain opposed to English with a Japanese accent. To shift such a mindset, it is indispensable to activate the ingenuity of in-service teachers to develop

and try out EIL, WE, and ELF concepts in classroom instruction.

Uchida and Sugimoto (2020) suggest using NNSs as positive models while teaching. However, teaching materials that reflect this suggestion are hard to find among ready-made materials in Japan. Based on longitudinal questionnaire surveys of textbook publishers, Kawashima (2018) revealed that nearly 90 percent of speakers used for model reading of authorized senior-high-school textbooks in Japan were from North America and that this pattern had remained consistent for 15 years. This demonstrates that NNS models are not available in most of the audio materials accompanying textbooks and that teachers need to develop classroom pedagogy reflecting EIL, WE, and ELF concepts independently. Fortunately, thanks to the advancement of the internet, teachers and students have more opportunities to access authentic listening materials in which NNSs interact successfully in English.

The following section describes two listening activities I conducted in order to present NNSs as competent English-user role models.

Activity 1: Exposure to Varieties of Nonnative English Accents

This activity features recorded interviews with (in my case) 20 NNSs of English, mostly from different countries than the students were from. A total of 15 interviews were adopted from two college textbooks published in Japan: *Englishes of the World* by Yoneoka and Arimoto (2000) and *English around the World* by Nakatani (2004). The remaining interviews were taped by myself when I attended an international training program for English teachers.

Any speech, interview, or dialog can be used for this activity as long as it is acceptable for students in terms of ease of listening, topics, and length. Excerpts should not be too long for students—100 to 150 words or about one and a half minutes would be suitable. Consider playing the audio two or three times in class.

Teachers can access the following online resources to acquire samples from a variety of English speakers (see Online Resources at the end of the article for web addresses):

- English Listening Lesson Library Online (2022) contains audiovisual recordings of diverse English speakers from different language backgrounds. Speeches, dialogs, and group conversations on varied topics are available.
- Listening Practice in Real English (2020) is a website I created, with 50 dialogs prepared by five pairs of NNSs, mainly from Asia, currently accessible for listening-comprehension quizzes. In the near future, more dialogs will be made by NNSs, primarily from Europe, and additional monologs will be recorded by NNSs from the Middle East, the Pacific, and Central and South America. The audio recordings are exact reproductions of the audio recordings used in high-stakes national tests for college admission in Japan, and speakers with a distinctive

L1 accent were selected to contrast with the recordings by American voice actors and actresses.

- Speech Accent Archive (2023) contains recordings of identical paragraphs by various NSs and NNSs of English.

To expose students to NNS English spoken by specific well-known personalities, teachers can visit the following websites, which offer not only audio recordings but also transcriptions:

- American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank (2023) contains speeches by Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Pope Francis, and many other famous personalities.
- The Nobel Prize (2023) provides acceptance speeches, Nobel lectures, and interviews with Nobel laureates.

Preparation begins with choosing a one-minute segment to be used in class and preparing the script for a listening cloze, also known as cloze dictation, which is easy to develop and suitable even for lower-level learners. For each of the interviews, I remove three content words from a script of 80 to 100 words (see Figure 1 for an example). The missing words should be recognizable to students, and the speaker

Front page of handout

A world map with the location of Estonia indicated is placed here (see Worldometer [2023] for maps of specific countries).

Comprehension question: Which country, besides the Soviet Union, occupied Estonia in the past?

Back page of handout

My name is Tiia, and I'm from Estonia. My country, Estonia, is a small country, which used to be a former Soviet _____. And it is situated in the north Europe. It was _____ by and incorporated into the Soviet Union over 80 years ago, and it got its independence in 1991. Estonia was _____ after the First World War for 20 years, and before that, we had Germans. Germans were in our country almost for 700 years.

Figure 1. Cloze exercise handout

A second exercise is to have students use the internet to explore how particular words ... are pronounced in different parts of the world.

should deliver them clearly. In my case, the number of words deleted was limited to three to keep a substantial portion of the script intact for students to easily follow the interview; advanced students could do the activity with more blanks to fill in. In addition, I prepared one comprehension question for each interview.

The setup for the cloze dictation activity (Morris and Tremblay 2002) is flexible and can differ from the format presented here. For example, cloze testing may be used with an information-gap activity in the classroom (see Vargas 2015) and as a listening assignment (see Schmidt 2016). Teachers can create cloze passages using the following online tools:

- CLOZEit (2023) gives teachers the option of selecting words to delete or asking the computer to do so, as well as the option to provide the first letter of the word as a hint.
- Teachers may make a cloze passage for every *n*th word (e.g., 3rd, 5th, 7th, ...) with Cloze Test (2023).

In each class, I distribute a handout before students listen to an interview. While listening for the first time, students are permitted to look at the front of the page, which displays

the name and location of the speaker's country on a world map and one question regarding the interview (see Figure 1). Next, students turn over the handout and read the interview script with blanks in place of the deleted words (again, there were three deletions in my case). During the second listening, students fill in the blanks. We then discuss the grammar and content of the interview, and students suggest what they feel are the missing words. I (or one or more students) write these suggestions on the board, and together we determine which words are correct. During the third listening, students pay close attention to the missing words and think about how to answer the comprehension question. An example of an interview with an Estonian speaker is shown in Figure 1, and the missing words are *republic*, *occupied*, and *independent*.

Teachers can decide what information to include in the handout. The cloze passage alone is fine, but teachers may add one or more comprehension questions so that students can focus more on the content. If teachers aim to broaden students' linguistic understanding, they may incorporate information about the location and language situation of the country and the native language of the speaker.

	British pronunciation	American pronunciation
data	/deɪtə/	/dɑːtə/
schedule	/ʃedjuːl/	/skedʒuːl/
tomato	/təməːtəʊ/	/təmeɪtəʊ/
vitamin	/vɪtəˌmɪn/	/vaɪtəˌmɪn/

Table 1. Pronunciation variations between British English and American English

Teachers should emphasize that familiarity with different English accents is critical for listening comprehension.

This listening activity can be expanded to become a speaking activity by having students record themselves reading the same script and compare their speech with that of speakers from other countries. Sharing what they have noticed about the pronunciation of words, stress, and other speaking elements with a group or the class is a beneficial extension activity.

A second exercise is to have students use the internet to explore how particular words, such as *data* and *schedule*, are pronounced in different parts of the world. This exercise helps students (1) realize that there are regional and personal variations in pronunciation, and (2) understand that it is difficult to draw a clear boundary separating American English and British English pronunciations on a world map. Table 1 has a list of words that are suitable for this activity.

Sounds of Englishes (2020) is a website where students can enter a word and listen to English audio samples from a chosen country—there are approximately 60 countries whose speech samples are searchable. Students listen to the audio and write down words pronounced differently from their own pronunciation. Teachers could also select countries and words ahead of time and have students listen to audio samples and report the number of incidences for each pronunciation. For instance, in 36 Australian speech samples of the word *data*, 33 are in American English, and only three are in British English. This task is eye-opening for Japanese students, who often think that people in Australia and New Zealand speak British English because of historical connections with the United Kingdom.

Another online exercise is listening to speeches made by world leaders. The United Nations website provides speech recordings of past General Assembly meetings from 2013

to 2022 (United Nations 2023). Kawashima (2021) investigated how many heads of state used English to address eight United Nations General Assembly sessions over 15 years (2004–2018). The findings show that English was used in 52.7 percent of the 1,540 speeches and that 84.4 percent of the speakers were presidents, prime ministers, or ministers of foreign affairs.

If teachers intend to emphasize that many factors other than accents are vital for communication, they can choose a few speakers, such as a more skilled speaker and a less proficient speaker. Then, they show part of the speech manuscript and ask students to imagine how they would deliver it. After watching the actual speech, students evaluate the delivery in terms of pronunciation, intonation, pauses, pace, and eye contact. Through viewing and discussion, students realize that other elements are just as important as or even more important for effective speech than one's accent.

Teachers who aim to raise students' interest in language choice can use the recordings to discuss why English was, or was not, chosen for the speech. According to Kawashima (2021), there are a few notable patterns in the leaders' language use:

- Some leaders of former members of the Soviet Union chose English, while others did not.
- Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spoke in English for one year and Japanese the other year.
- All the Canadian speakers presented in English and French, but the frequency of code-switching differed from person to person.

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it is natural that each speaker sounds different.
Sounding different, therefore, is usual, and we should not
label unfamiliar accents as strange or inferior.**

Teachers can choose one of the three patterns and ask students to predict the language in which certain leaders would deliver their message. Discussions about why they chose English or another language is an effective way to gain insight into language roles.

Monitoring Students' Reactions

It is important to monitor students' reactions from time to time by offering them opportunities to express their thoughts through reflection papers, discussions, and group presentations. Mere exposure to nonstandard English can lead to listeners labeling unfamiliar varieties as strange, difficult, or incorrect (Galloway and Rose 2018). To prevent students from reinforcing stereotypes of NNS English, teachers should assess students' reactions and provide adequate feedback.

I suggest using the same questions repeatedly as a prompt to elicit students' reflections. Teachers should monitor students' reactions at least twice, following the first and last activities. If more activities are conducted for a longer period, teachers should also consider collecting students' reactions in the middle.

A reflection-process model is useful for assessing students' reactions, and Freeman (1989) proposed four areas to consider: knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness (KASA framework). In other words, teachers inquire about what new information students learned as a result of the activity (knowledge); how students felt and what they thought about the speakers and their English (attitude); what students learned to do (skill); and what kinds of reflections students were engaged in during the activity (awareness). Teachers can

save time in collecting students' reactions by using Google Forms or compare changes in students' reflections over time by entering their reactions in a spreadsheet.

My experience reveals several reactions that students are likely to exhibit following their first exposure to nonnative accents. For one thing, students are more likely than not to express difficulty in understanding NNSs of English. Teachers should emphasize that familiarity with different English accents is critical for listening comprehension. They can also ask students how difficult it is to understand language varieties spoken in different parts of their country. In general, dialects that we hear more often are easier to comprehend.

Teachers should also stress that having an accent is inevitable. Everybody, including NSs, has an accent, and it is natural that each speaker sounds different. Sounding different, therefore, is usual, and we should not label unfamiliar accents as strange or inferior. "Standard English," which we often hear in listening tests and in audio materials accompanying textbooks, is just one accent.

The reflections I collected from my students demonstrate three changes:

- 1.** Exposure to NNS English expanded students' knowledge of and perspective on English. The knowledge that English is truly spoken worldwide helped students become aware of their previous narrow view of English.
- 2.** Students learned that the Japanese are not the only people speaking English with an accent, a realization that brought

relief to some students and gave them a new impetus to speak English. They came to see accents as something unique and stopped worrying about their accent.

3. Realizing different levels of ease in comprehension reminded students that speaking comprehensible English is more important than caring about how similar to an American's accent their own English sounds.

Activity 2: Exposure to English Speakers from the Same Country

The second activity focuses on introducing English speakers from the same country that the students are from. In my case, it includes 18 audio or video recordings of well-known Japanese individuals speaking English. Most of the audiovisual resources are collected via YouTube. I chose speakers based on three criteria: comprehensibility of English, popularity among the students, and balance in professions.

For ease of listening, I select speeches that I judge to be internationally intelligible. I avoid English spoken with an excessively strong Japanese accent; some Japanese novice learners tend to add a vowel to English words ending with a consonant because most Japanese words end with a vowel. At the same time, I avoid those who speak native-like English with little or no Japanese accent. I made this decision because so-called "returnees," who had spent their childhood in English-speaking countries, would be regarded as an out-group, and they could not be considered achievable models by students who lacked such an experience.

I chose a diverse range of speakers to reflect various professions, including members of the royal family, a politician, novelists, high-ranking officers of an international organization, presidents of large companies, an astronaut, an actor, a comical storyteller, scientists, and an athlete. In the recordings I have used, 11 speakers respond spontaneously to interviewers' questions, whereas seven deliver prepared speeches.

To prepare for the activity, I select a part of the speech/interview that seems easiest for students to grasp. The part is then transcribed for cloze dictation, and I create a script with five blanks (again, teachers can adjust the number of blanks). The segments I select last for about a minute and a half on average, and the scripts have an average length of just under 150 words, although teachers can choose shorter or longer samples, depending on their students' ability. In addition, I make a comprehension question for each speech/interview.

Teachers can use the same online resources from Activity 1, along with YouTube, to locate short speeches and/or interviews with transcripts for this activity. The selection of speakers is critical; they should be familiar to students as fellow citizens of their country. In terms of transcript preparation, teachers can access English subtitles on many YouTube videos by clicking on the closed caption (CC) function at the bottom of the video; they can then transcribe the spoken English by using the voice-typing function of Google Docs or the dictation function of Microsoft Word.

I start the activity by distributing a handout and asking one comprehension question. After that, students listen to or watch a speaker give a speech or respond in an interview. They are not permitted to read the transcript written on the handout for the first listening. They read the transcript during the second and third listenings and fill in the blanks. We then discuss the grammar and meaning of the speech/interview, determine the five missing words, and go over the answer to the comprehension question. We cover two English-speaking compatriots in one lesson.

Students then compare their answers in pairs or groups and share their impressions of watching or listening to well-known celebrities speaking English. Questions to pose to students include, "Do you think he/she is a good English speaker? Why do you think so?" and "What do you think about their pronunciation, word choice, and intonation?"

The overview of learner reactions suggests that English-using NNSs can serve as role models for English learners, allowing them to envision a tangible, attainable ideal L2 self.

This activity aims to teach students that even local celebrities or heroes can become competent English users and that living or studying abroad is not a must. To further realize this goal, teachers may assign students to search for other proficient English speakers in their country and share their results. This task can be assigned as a group project, and students collaborate to find someone from their country who speaks English proficiently. Later, they play an audio of that person speaking English and explain the context of the interaction. Following the students' reports, the teacher can ask the class for comments about each speaker's English and interaction style.

Another useful assignment that builds on prior group work is to ask about the language backgrounds of effective English speakers from the students' country. Students do research to discover how someone from their own country learned English and present their results to the class. Teachers then facilitate a discussion on how those learning methods can be adapted to students' own language learning.

Teachers can add historical figures to the list of candidates if biographies or autobiographies are available.

Monitoring Students' Reactions

To collect students' reflections, teachers can use the same approach that was used in Activity 1. Teachers monitor how students perceive the English their countrymen speak and what they think of the speakers by asking questions that measure knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness. My students' reactions to Activity 2 demonstrate that negative reflections in the beginning grew more positive later on; again, I highlight three main takeaways:

1. Students expressed pleasant surprise about the well-known Japanese personalities' skillfulness in English and were impressed with the speakers' ability to respond spontaneously.
2. Negative evaluations of Japanese English, such as "not good," "not beautiful," "clumsy," and "funny," declined sharply from the beginning of the activity to the end. The decrease may indicate a positive change in students' views about Japanese English, which was also supported by the steadily falling percentage of concerns about the intelligibility of Japanese English.
3. Students' interest in the speakers' English-learning techniques increased, particularly in the latter half of the course. A growing number of comments speculated on why and how those people became able to speak English well, suggesting that some students began to consider how they could emulate their role models.

CONCLUSION

This article describes two activities that expose learners to NNS models as their future English-using self-images. These activities help learners recognize that they may have a narrow view of English and that everyone speaks with an accent. For my students, the activities sparked the realization that speaking understandable English is more important than sounding like an American and that an accent demonstrates uniqueness and originality.

Based on my students' experiences, the awareness and knowledge gained from

researching well-known NNS personalities using English contributes to a positive attitude shift toward their variety of English. Furthermore, understanding that some well-known personalities use English skillfully aroused my learners' interest in successful English-learning techniques and encouraged them to improve their own approaches to English studies.

The overview of learner reactions suggests that English-using NNSs can serve as role models for English learners, allowing them to envision a tangible, attainable ideal L2 self. NNSs not only serve as realistic role models for a wide range of English use across the world, but they can also enhance learners' English-using self-images. I hope this article will enlighten teachers about the benefits of utilizing NNS models and motivate them to experiment in their educational settings. Though the focus here is on instruction and learner reactions in a Japanese setting, the potential instructional impact of NNS models applies to many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts where role models other than NNSs are restricted.

Finally, a word of caution should also be added. Reports from Cambodia (Lim 2016) and Türkiye (Sifakis and Bayyurt 2015) indicate that some EFL teachers who have received ELF-aware training face tensions because of a mismatch between what they have learned and the expectations of their students and other stakeholders (e.g., school administrators and students' parents). Therefore, teachers need to be prepared for negative reactions and remain persistent in their efforts. There is a theory–practice gap between the conceptualization of EIL, WE, and ELF and the instruction of the concepts in the classroom. Progress is being made, but it may take time for textbooks, teaching materials, and international proficiency tests to reflect these concepts, which have potentially long-lasting benefits for English language learners.

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- Sounds of Englishes. 2020. <https://noriko-nakanishi.com/sounds/index.php>
- Speech Accent Archive. 2023. <https://accent.gmu.edu/>
- The Nobel Prize. 2023. <https://www.nobelprize.org/>
- Worldometer. 2023. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-map/>

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ONLINE RESOURCES

- American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank. 2023. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speechbank.htm>
- Cloze Test. 2023. <http://l.georges.online.fr/tools/cloze.html>
- CLOZEit. 2023. <https://clozeit.syedkhairi.com/>